

Commissioner's Weekly Wrap Up

DCS Communications Office

September 3, 2004

This Week In Central Office

Monday, August 30

Commissioner Miller attended the System of Care Symposium with members of the Children's Cabinet.

Tuesday, August 31

Commissioner Miller gave closing remarks at the CQI kick-off meeting in Fall Creek Falls.

She also attended the Davidson County Foster and Adoption Association meeting.

Wednesday, September 1

The Commissioner visited with staff and students at Wilder Youth Development Center and the Jackson Group Home.

The Week Ahead

Wednesday, September 8

Commissioner Miller and Governor Bredesen will join First Lady Andrea Conte for the kick-off of Andrea Walks for Tennessee's Children at the Memphis Child Advocacy Center.

Thursday, September 9

The Commissioner will be the featured guest on WTVF-TV's "Morning Line" at 8 a.m. – 9 a.m., on Comcast channel 50 in the Nashville area. The show will be rebroadcast the same day starting at 3 p.m.

Sick Leave Bank Deadline Approaching



The Sick Leave Bank guidelines require a one (1) day donation of sick leave October 1 for continued membership in the Sick Leave Bank. In order to maintain your membership in the bank, you must meet the October 1, 2004 annual assessment. The Sick Leave Bank will process the assessment of current membership on October 1, 2004, based on sick leave balances at the end of September.

Please be aware, if you fail to save one (1) sick leave day and miss the October 1 assessment, your membership in the Sick Leave Bank will be terminated.

Therefore, you must have accrued and saved a minimum of one (1) sick leave day as of September 30, 2004 and hold that one (1) sick leave day until the assessment is completed on **October 1, 2004**.

Members who are on leave without pay the major portion of September 2004, and do not accrue a day of sick leave in that month, must notify the Sick Leave Bank Administrator and their personnel office as soon as they return to work and accrue one (1) day of sick leave. **That one (1) day of sick leave must be held and donated to the Sick Leave Bank in order to maintain membership in the bank.**

If you have any questions regarding this process or need a copy of the Sick Leave Bank Guidelines, please contact your regional, institutional, and/or central personnel office, or visit the website at www.state.tn.us/personnel/resources/sickleave.

Guidelines for Job Performance Evaluations

The concept of **fairness** in performance evaluation pertains to the principle of “no surprises”. More specifically, this means that employees must (a.) know what is expected of them at the beginning of an evaluation period and (b.) receive specific performance feedback well before the annual evaluation so that, if necessary, improvements in performance can be demonstrated before the official evaluation is done.

The concept of **accuracy** in performance evaluations pertains to whether job performance ratings and supporting documentation given to an employee is a true reflection of performance. In other words, are the statements contained in the documentation factual and is the documentation consistent with the ratings given?

Procedures Relating to Principle of Fairness

Job Planning Discussion (JPP) includes a review of employee’s major job responsibilities and performance expectations so the employee understands what he or she is expected to do and the performance level required to achieve a satisfactory (or better) rating. If some responsibilities are more important than others, this should also be discussed. Evidence that a discussion occurred would include a signed and dated job plan, or signatures and dates on the front of the evaluation form in the Job Performance and Planning block. The date of the job planning discussion should be near the beginning of the evaluation cycle so that the employee has sufficient time to receive timely performance feedback and to demonstrate satisfactory job performance well before the annual evaluation. This step is especially critical during periods of probation, and when there is a job reclassification, assignment of new major responsibilities and/or a change in supervisor.

Adequate and Timely Performance Feedback

Adequate performance feedback within the context of the performance evaluation includes at least one interim review of performance based

on the job responsibilities and performance expectations identified in the job plan. An **adequate** interim review is one in which the employee clearly understands how the supervisor views current performance, whether there are any significant problems which need to be addressed, and if appropriate, what must be done to correct problems or to improve performance before the formal evaluation. This feedback must be sufficiently specific, so that the employee would know how he or she would be rated if the evaluation were to occur at that point in time. **Timely** feedback refers essentially to the time period between the last interim review and the formal evaluation. Since the purpose of the interim review is to allow the employee to address any performance concerns prior to the annual evaluation, there must be a sufficient time period for improvements to be demonstrated. Factors, which ought to be taken into consideration, includes, the nature and complexity of the work and supervisor opportunity to observe performance. In addition, a performance **incident** near the end of an evaluation cycle would not necessarily require an additional annual interim review or extension of the evaluation period.

Principle of Accuracy Procedures: Properly Documented Annual Evaluation

Evaluation ratings must be documented with factual statements and be consistent with the employees demonstrated performance over the course of the rating period. Overall ratings must also be consistent with individual responsibility ratings considering any supervisors weightings of responsibilities. If documentation is weak or inconsistent the greater the risk that factors other than performance can be viewed as influencing the ratings. If documentation is factual and reasonable, it is very difficult to make a case for an inaccurate evaluation, especially if the annual evaluation documentation is consistent with previous interim review documentation.

From The Commissioner's Inbox

Note: The following is an e-mail Commissioner Miller received on August 23 commending Knox County CM3 Patricia Newman on her exceptional work and commitment to DCS and Tennessee's children!

Commissioner Miller:



I would like to give you some feedback on Ms. Newman who has been an assigned caseworker for two foster children that my wife and I have fostered over the past 4-5 months.

First let me tell you a little background about ourselves. My wife and I have been foster parents for nearly two years. We first got into the program because of the needs of a newborn baby that came into our lives back in October of 2002. We initially only intended to foster the child for a short time until other arrangements could be made. However, the longer this child stayed in our home the more we knew that we did not want to let him go. Therefore, my wife and I entered into the foster to adopt program. We finalized adoption of this first child in February of 2004 and we couldn't be happier.

As a little more background: my wife and I are over 50 years of age. We have grown children aging between 24 and 30. Why would we even think about adopting at this age? Many people our age are positioning themselves for retirement. The last thing they want to do is take on more responsibility. WE love children, there are children in TN that need a loving home and we want to make a difference in the lives of as many as we can.

Over the past 10-11 months I would estimate that we have fostered between 6 and 8 children for varying lengths of time. We currently have a 14 month old who we have had for 4-5 months. He has some developmental challenges due to the fact that his mother was on drugs during pregnancy but we see real signs of improvement.

Ms. Patricia Newman is the DCS case worker assigned to this child. She has been wonderful to work with and has been available to help us out with any issues with this child. Of the past 3-4 caseworkers we have dealt with she is clearly the best we have ever been exposed to. Obviously we are not veterans in this program but she has exceeded our expectations as to not only caring for the best interests of the child but also supporting our needs as well.

All this background leads me to another situation that I must tell you about. About a month ago Ms. Newman called us and asked if we would be willing to provide respite care for a teenage girl for about 2 weeks. Our first response was thanks but no thanks. We have in the past turned down foster parenting for teenagers due somewhat due to our age but also to the fact that we have a two year old son and we were apprehensive about bringing a teenager into our home. We felt bad about turning down teenagers but just weren't confident that we could handle the situation. After we initially declined to take the teenager Ms.

Newman called us about, she further explained that this child was in a unique situation in that she was under the Youth Villages program and that if she couldn't find a foster family in the Knoxville area that she would have to go to Chattanooga for respite care. Ms. Newman also told us that she knew this child very well and that she would vouch for her character. My wife and I discussed this and based on our personal confidence in Ms. Newman agreed to provide respite care for 2 weeks.

I now understand that Ms. Newman may not have followed protocol with respect to this child since she was under Youth Villages and maybe should not have been placed with us but rather sent to Chattanooga with someone else. Let me now tell you about what Ms. Newman's actions have done.

My wife and I have fallen in love with this 14 year old child. We have worked with DCS and the previous foster family to get her permanently placed in our home as a foster child. We have informed DCS and this child that we desire to adopt her into our family. DCS is working with the birth parents to hopefully get them to surrender their rights so that we can start healing wounds that have developed over many years.

My wife and I had no intention of adopting another child until this young lady came into our lives. She needs a loving family. She needs to understand what a normal family life is like. My wife and I want to help her realize what every child should experience.

If it were not for Ms. Newman's extra efforts with this child there is no telling where this might have ended up. We pray every night that the paperwork on this child moves ahead smoothly so that we can finalize an adoption as soon as possible.

It is our opinion that Ms. Newman is a credit to your agency. She clearly put the child's best interests first and foremost. If protocol was not followed exactly I hope you will be understanding and not be too harsh in criticizing her actions. I would be most happy to discuss this over the telephone if you desire.

I would also like to fill you in on another issue with respect to our 14-month foster child that desperately needs some additional consideration.

I look forward to a continuing relationship with DCS and the foster parenting program.

Greg and Ronna Turner
Powell, TN

Summertime Slim Down Update - Juvenile Justice

One of the most popular summertime slim down recommendations from juvenile justice staff concerned the automation of their monthly statistical report. The monthly report provides critical information regarding changes in the juvenile justice population but the report had to be done manually and required the time of not only case managers but others to produce an office and regional composite. The recommendation to automate the report was recognized and the first automated report was produced in June 2004. Some "bugs" were identified resulting in some modifications, and the second report was produced in July 2004. Case managers will no longer have to produce a monthly statistical report; it's all automated and will be shared with the regions each month.

Employee Promotions



Please join us in congratulating Maggie Winbush on her recent appointment to the position of interim assistant director of DCS personnel.

Andrea Walks for Tennessee's Children



It's not too late to sign up to walk with First Lady Andrea Conte! Please visit the link below to register for the statewide walk to raise money for Tennessee's CACs!

www.active.com/event_detail.cfm?event_id=1149520



The art of acting morally is behaving as if everything we do matters.

- Gloria Steinum

Bravery is the capacity to perform properly even when scared half to death.

- General Omar Nelson Bradley

Act as if it were impossible to fail.

- Dorteia Brande
